

INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC IN NEWS ARTICLES FROM REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

et al.,	And others
ibid	In the same work and page
I E	Idiomatic Expression
lit	Literal translation
SL	Source Language
ST	Source Text
TL	Target Language
TT	Target Text

MENGKAJI MASALAH PENTERJEMAHAN UNGKAPAN YANG BERSIFAT IDIOMATIK DARIPADA BAHASA INGGERIS KE BAHASA ARAB DALAM PETIKAN AKHBAR AGENSI BERITA REUTERS

ABSTRAK

Menterjemah teks bahasa Inggeris yang mengandungi ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik merupakan antara tugas yang amat mencabar untuk dilakukan. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji masalah dalam penterjemahan ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik daripada bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa sumber (SL) ke dalam bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa sasaran (TL) dalam agensi berita Reuters, serta menjelaskan kaedah yang paling sesuai untuk menterjemah ungkapan idiomatik tersebut. Korpus kajian ini dipetik dari 50 artikel akhbar agensi berita Reuters. Kerangka teoretis untuk kajian ini disesuaikan daripada teori Delisle (1988). Dapatan kajian telah memberi gagasan baru dalam menilai kaedah bagi penterjemahan ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik pada setiap empat tahap manipulasi bahasa yang dianjurkan oleh Delisle (1988) serta satu lagi tahap yang digunakan dalam kajian ini bagi menampung unit-unit yang tidak diterjemahkan. Didapati bahawa beberapa halangan dalam penterjemahan ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik telah menghasilkan penterjemahan mesej bahasa sumber yang tidak tepat. Penyelidikan ini menyimpulkan bahawa tahap manipulasi bahasa, pencarian padanan kesamaan dalam sistem linguistik serta penafsiran gaya selayaknya digunakan tatkala menterjemah ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik. Oleh itu, lebih penting lagi, penterjemah harus memilih satu kaedah yang sesuai sewaktu melakukan penterjemahan menurut tahap manipulasi bahasa, serta berpengetahuan dan berkelayakan di dalam seluruh aspek ungkapan yang bersifat idiomatik kedua-dua bahasa.

INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC IN NEWS ARTICLES FROM REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

ABSTRACT

Translating English texts that comprise idiomatic expressions represent one of the most challenging tasks for translators to accomplish. Thus, the present study is concerned with the problems of translating idiomatic expressions from English as the SL into Arabic as the TL in Reuters news agency and sheds light on the most appropriate method for translating idiomatic expressions. The corpus of this study consists of 50 newspaper articles that are taken from Reuters news agency. The theoretical framework for the study is adapted from the works of Delisle (1988). The findings show new ideas on evaluating the steps for rendering idiomatic expressions on each of the four levels of language manipulation as proposed by Delisle (1988). Moreover, another level is adopted to accommodate units that have not been translated. It has also been found that some obstacles on the translation of idiomatic expressions have led to inaccurate transmission of the source text message. The research concludes that the level of language manipulation, retrieval of standard equivalents from the linguistic system and the level of interpreting style are appropriately used in translating the idiomatic expressions. Thus, most importantly translators should choose a proper method when doing translation according to the levels of language manipulation, be fully aware and comprehend the various aspects of the idiomatic expressions of both languages.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This research intends to identify the problems that translators face when translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic as well as determining the most appropriate strategies in translating such expressions when they occur in newspaper articles. In the present research, the analysis is concerned particularly with the translation of idiomatic expressions into Arabic in newspaper articles produced by Reuters news agency. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction of the study, insofar as it defines key concepts and gives an overview of the main issues to be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

1.1 The Problem

Briefly, an idiom is a phrase or a group of words whose meaning cannot be determined literally by the words and the structure used (McArthur, 1985:364). It refers to a figurative meaning and is normally used in everyday language. Thus, a person learning a new language, for example English may find idiomatic expressions difficult to grasp, as the meanings are not obvious from the words used. Also, the English language is known to be a language that is very idiomatic and that all native speakers of English use idioms in their speech. (Ilyas, 1989:120). Therefore, to speak well in English means to be able to understand and use the idioms that make up the language as fluently as possible in order to sound natural.

In the context of translation, there are some universally known idioms that are easily understood and survive across language transfer, but idioms of one culture, do not normally translate well into a different language of a different culture. Most of the time, when they are translated from one language into another, the meaning of the idiom is either lost, changed, adapted or omitted. One reason why idioms do not survive translation is because it is an area of language that is closest to culture and as such, idiomatic expressions in a way represent one cultural facet, and hence being a part of culture, they may present problems to translators.

To be able to translate a particular idiom well from one language into another, the translator has to understand the culture behind it and how the idioms are used, as well as the meaning that it is trying to convey. What makes sense in one culture might not make sense in a different culture. The same can be said about idioms. A detailed discussion on culture, language and issues in the translation of idioms with regards to culture is explored further in Chapter 2.

There are controversial arguments among linguists over translating idiomatic expressions literally on one hand and metaphorically on the other. In addition, an approach that might be sufficient in translating a certain type of idiomatic expressions might not be so in translating another type of idiom. This may cause various problems to arise in the process of translating idiomatic expressions, as one has to suggest different approaches for every type of idiomatic expressions. Therefore, translating idioms can be extremely difficult, even when one has to express the core meaning of the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). In the translation process, the translator might face momentary blocks in comprehending the idiomatic

expressions of the SL, whose meanings are influenced by the intentions of the participants (Delisle 1988). Newmark (1991:74) mentions that translation problems occur with cultural expressions i.e. when delving into the concept of idiomaticity against or within the English and Arabic cultures. Arabic readers might face problems in understanding translated texts from English into Arabic that contain idiomatic expressions for various reasons. The dilemma in the translation, however, is the extent to which the cultural idioms of SL can be clarified.

One of the objectives of this research, which are stated in a later section, is therefore to establish the most appropriate method for translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic. Through observations of some works done on this area and a thorough analysis of selected texts that are presented in chapter 4, it is hoped that a suitable method can be identified in order to eliminate the difficulties and controversies in translating idiomatic expressions. This study however, represents the efforts of the researcher to show that the problems in the translation of idiomatic expressions can be investigated and analyzed.

Below are samples of obstacles that may occur when translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic as observed by Ghazala (1996: 49:3 209-213), who asserts that they are due to certain reasons as follows:

1. The translator's incompetence.

As in the following example: **to leave no stone unturned:** Unable to find an equivalent idiom in Arabic, and uncertain about the soundness of literal translation, an incompetent translator might translate it as 'يفعل كل ما في وسعه' /yfaalu kul maafii

wis•ihi/ (to do one's best). A better idiomatic version is 'يطرق كل الأبواب' / yTrg kul al-Abwaab/ (to knock at all doors). However, the meaning of the idiomatic expressions originates from the figurative language of the original situation that is unfamiliar to some translators.

2. Zero Language equivalence in TL

For Example: **spick and span:** This idiom is taken from the English ship industry, where in a newly built ship spick stands for 'nail' and span for 'a piece of wood'. It connotes a description of something as clean, neat, tidy and new. This idiomatic image is unmatchable in Arabic because most idiomatic expressions are culture – specific. Some idiomatic expressions rendered into another language may not be comprehended by TL readers since such idiomatic expressions embody culture-specific phenomena. Therefore the translator has to concede this and look for a good translation of sense like 'أنيق و مرتب' /?aniiq wamuratb/ (neat and tidy); 'نظيف جداً' / nadiif jidan/ (very clean).

It is quite possible, however, to imagine that the meaning of an idiomatic expression represents certain symbols or ideas in any language according to its cultural components. In English like in Arabic, the unacceptability of some arrangements is not predictably based on compatibility in meanings of individual items, but rather on the conventions of the target language (Valdes, 1986:50). The translator who is not aware of these conventions may deviate from the equivalent effect principle and produce unacceptable translations. For instance, in a study conducted by Newmark (1991:74), he states an example of intercultural and interlinguistic relations between Arabic and English that the 'sun' is as oppressive in Arab countries as it is lovely in

English. In fact, the problem is the degree to which the cultural expression is to be explained in the translation that demands extra effort in its analysis.

According to Ilyas (1989:128), some Arabic expressions are associated with **cold weather** in order to express positive and favorable connotations of joy and delight to Arabs. A translator of English-Arabic texts may face some problematic ecology based on idioms and expressions such as ' خبر يثلج الصدر ' /khabarun yuthlij al-Sadir/ (news that freezes the chest). On the contrary, certain idiomatic expressions refer to **cold** as having unfavorable connotations as in the following table (1.1) examples extracted from **NTC'S American IDIOMS Dictionary** (Spears, 2000:107)

Table 1.1 Certain idiomatic expressions referring to “cold” (Spears , 2000:107)

Idiomatic expression	The meaning
A cold fish	a person who is distant and unfeeling.
Cold comfort	no comfort or consolation at all.
Cold, hard cash	not cheques or promises
Get cold feet and have cold feet	to become timid or frightened
Get the cold shoulder	to be ignored; to be rejected
Go cold turkey	to stop (doing something) without tapering off.
In cold blood	without feeling.
Keep someone out in the cold	to prevent someone from being informed
Knock someone out (cold)	1. to knock someone unconscious 2. to overwhelm someone.
Leave someone out in the cold	to fail to inform someone
Make someone's blood run cold	to shock or horrify someone
Out cold	unconscious

Thus, we must take into account the problems fronting translators in rendering such culture-bound idiomatic expressions as the above, with entirely unusual experiences and principles as found and followed in the English world vis-à-vis the Arabic-speaking world. When translating, a translator must think about the fact that he is supposed to transfer the message, rather than simple words. The translator should be aware and sensitive to the cultures of SL and TL. He might realize an obstacle when

he tries to find the idiomatic equivalent in the TL, a matter that leads him sometimes to borrow the whole idiom into the TL. This can be seen in modern Arabic idioms used in journalism as will be dealt with in this study.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. to identify how idiomatic expressions are translated based on a descriptive comparative study of the source text (SL) and their translations in the target text (TL).
2. to determine the kind of problems Arab translators face in translating idiomatic expressions.
3. to find and select appropriate strategies for decoding and re-encoding the idiomatic expressions for improving the quality of translation so as to make the process of translation more fresh, accurate and elegant.
4. to provide translators with ample source of amenable information for both Arabic and English applications to idiomatic expressions according to the cultures of both speech communities.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the most appropriate methods for translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic ?
2. What are the problems that translators face when translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study has been designed to shed light on the problems of translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic. It is hoped that the findings of this study would be of value to specialists in translation, applied linguists, textbook producers and teachers. It would form a basis for a more clear understanding of the efforts to improve the quality of translating idiomatic expressions and provide accurate recognition of the translation of idiomatic expressions, especially by translators.

1.5 The Limitation of the Study

The present study is carried out using 50 newspaper articles taken as corpus for comparison and analysis of the translation of idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic. There are many English – Arabic sources of newspaper articles but the focus is only on texts produced by Reuter news agency, which is one of the main sources for news in the world. For the purpose of finding various types of idiomatic expressions, only English newspaper articles as the SL, and their translations into Arabic as the TL, are used, and in order to control the diversity of the journalistic style of the newspaper articles served by many proficient translators, only 50 newspaper articles are selected. Another limitation of this study is with respect to the types of idioms that are preferred for analysis. This study adapts Seidl & McMordie's (2003) category (as in 2.6) on the types of idioms that are used in English newspaper articles. A working definition of idioms has been provided and will be used in this study because many expressions can fall under the definition of idioms. Proverbs and sayings are excluded from the study.

In the meantime, the rest of the study looks like this:

Chapter 1 presents details of the research including the introduction, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance and limitation of the study. Included in this chapter is also a section which provides some background information on the Arabic language, figures of speech, idioms and culture that may be necessary and relevant for the understanding of this thesis.

Chapter 2 discusses researches and works that have been done on the subject, to help set a direction for the present thesis. It represents a review of literature.

Chapter 3 sets the theoretical framework and the methodology of this study.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of the corpus extracted from the newspaper articles.

Chapter 5 offers pertinent conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Perhaps at this point, it might be necessary to present some background knowledge on the Arabic language structure and terms normally associated with it to help in the understanding of the whole study.

1.6 Division of Arabic sentences

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2009) states:

Arabic is the language of the Koran and the religious language of all Muslims. Literary Arabic, usually called Classical Arabic, is essentially the form of the language found in the Koran, with some modifications necessary for its use in modern times; it is uniform throughout the Arab world. Colloquial Arabic includes numerous spoken dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible. The chief dialect groups are those of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa. With the exception of the dialect of Algeria, all Arabic dialects have been strongly influenced by the literary language.

Haywood and Nahmad (1965:3) also state that Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and that this language has seen the birth of many great writers and poets such as al-Mutannabbi and Ibn Khaldun, and others, whilst the modern literary language is exemplified by writers like Taha Hussein and Taufiq al Hakim.

The Arabic language contains two types of sentences:

1.6.1 The verbal sentence

1.6.2 The nominal sentence

To help clarify the meaning of abbreviations of some key terms used in this section, the explanations for them are given below:

-
- | | |
|------|------------------|
| i) | MASC - masculine |
| ii) | ACC - accusative |
| iii) | 3 - third person |
| iv) | SG - singular |
| v) | NOM - nominative |

Below is a brief description of both types of sentences.

1.6.1 The verbal sentence ^{الجملة الفعلية} /al-ğumlatu-l-filiyyatu/

This type begins with the verb followed by the subject. The verb is always in the singular form even in cases where the subject is dual or plural. Traditionally, the word order of the Arabic verbal sentence according to Mohammad (2000:1) consists of first the verb, then the subject, and finally the object. For example, the Arabic sentence قابل زيد عامر as shown in table (1.2).

Table 1.2 The verbal sentence. Mohammad (2000:1)

Verb (V) 1	subject(S) 2	object (O) 3
قابل	زيد	عمر
Qaabala	Zayd	Amr
(met) 3SG.MASC	NOM	ACC

Thus the translation of the Arabic sentence قابل زيد عمر is 'Zed met Amr'.

1.6.2 The nominal sentence: الجُمْلَةُ الإِسْمِيَّةُ /al-ğumlatu-l-ismiyyatu/

The sentence begins with the noun, followed by the other components. The verb must agree with the subject in number and gender. Mohammad (2000:1) states that the word order of a nominal sentence is the subject preceding the predicate.

For example the Arabic sentence: احمد طبيب as shown in table (1.3).

Table 1.3 The nominal sentence. Mohammad (2000:1)

Subject (1)	Predicate (2)
احمد	طبيب
Ahmed	tabib (doctor)
NOM	NOM

The translation of the Arabic sentence احمد طبيب is "Ahmed is a doctor".

1.7 Word order of Arabic idiomatic expressions

After revealing the word order of Arabic sentences, there is usually a need to show the word order of idiomatic expressions in an Arabic sentence. The word order of an Arabic idiom is similar to the behavior of an English idiom in the structure of the English sentence. Mohammad (2000:74) asserts that the vast majority of Arabic idioms agree with the sense of the subject in the Arabic sentence as well. The subject does not affect the translation of the object in expressions of its thematic role, and the same goes the other way around. Consider the following examples:

1. The sentence: احمد ضيع كتابه as shown in table (1.4).

Table 1.4 The word order of Arabic sentence . Mohammad (2000:74)

Subject	Verb	Object
احمد	ضيع	كتابه
Ahmed	dayya	kitaabah
Ahmed	lost	book-his (3 SG. MASC)

The translation of the Arabic sentence احمد ضيع كتابه is "Ahmed lost his book".

2. The sentence: احمد ضيع عقله as shown in table (1.5).

Table 1.5 The word order of idiomatic expressions. Mohammad (2000:74)

Subject	Verb	Object
احمد	ضيع	عقله
Ahmed	dayya	aqlah
Ahmed	lost	mind-him (3 SG. MASC)

The translation of the Arabic sentence احمد ضيع عقله is "Ahmed lost his mind". (He went crazy)

3. The sentence: احمد ضيع عمره as shown in table (1.6).

Table 1.6 The word order of idiomatic expressions. Mohammad (2000:74)

Subject	Verb	Object
احمد	ضيع	عمره
Ahmed	dayya	umrh
Ahmed	lost	life – his (3SG . MASC)

The translation of the Arabic sentence احمد ضيع عمره is "Ahmed wasted his life". (doing useless things)

As can be seen from the above, sentence 1 does not contain any idiomatic expression as found in sentences 2 and 3. This shows that the object affects the thematic role of

the idiomatic expressions in the above sentences, i.e. the object illustrates the meaning of the idiomatic expressions in Arabic language.

1.8 The Alphabet: transliteration and pronunciation

The Arabic alphabet according to Faris and Sultan (1981:11) is the script used for writing the Arabic language that is written from right to left, and in a cursive style of script. There are 28 basic letters in the Arabic alphabet as shown in table (1.7). Because some of the vowels are indicated with optional symbols, the script is classified as Abjad.

Table 1.7 The Arabic Alphabet: translation and pronunciation
(Source: Haywood and Nahmad, 1965:3)

IPA	Latin	Name	Final	Medial	Initial	Isolated	IPA	Latin	Name	Final	Medial	Initial	Isolated
[tʰ]	t	tā' طاء	ط	ط	ط	ط	[ʔ]	'(a)	'alif ألف	ا	—	—	ا
[zʰ]	z	zā' ظاء	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	[b]	b	bā' باء	ب	ب	ب	ب
[ʕ]	'	'ayn عين	ع	ع	ع	ع	[t]	t	tā' تاء	ت	ت	ت	ت
[ɣ]	g	gayn غين	غ	غ	غ	غ	[θ]	t	tā' ثاء	ث	ث	ث	ث
[f]	f	fā' فاء	ف	ف	ف	ف	[dʒ]	ǧ	ǧīm جيم	ج	ج	ج	ج
[q]	q	qāf قاف	ق	ق	ق	ق	[ħ]	ħ	ħā' حاء	ح	ح	ح	ح
[k]	k	kāf كاف	ك	ك	ك	ك	[x]	ħ	ħā' خاء	خ	خ	خ	خ
[l]	l	lām لام	ل	ل	ل	ل	[d]	d	dāl دال	د	—	—	د
[m]	m	mīm ميم	م	م	م	م	[ð]	ð	ðāl ذال	ذ	—	—	ذ
[n]	n	nūn نون	ن	ن	ن	ن	[r]	r	rā' راء	ر	—	—	ر
[h]	h	hā' هاء	ه	ه	ه	ه	[z]	z	zāy زاي	ز	—	—	ز
[w]	w	wāw واو	و	—	—	و	[s]	s	sīn سين	س	س	س	س
[j]	y	yā' ياء	ي	ي	ي	ي	[ʃ]	š	šīn شين	ش	ش	ش	ش
		hamza همزة	ء	—	—	—	[sʰ]	ṣ	ṣād صاد	ص	ص	ص	ص
							[dʰ]	ḍ	ḍād ضاد	ض	ض	ض	ض

1.8.1 Vowels

The Arabic language graphically has six vowels, three short vowels and three long ones. These vowels are not written in the body of the word, but they are added above or under the consonant to which they refer. The "fathah:" and "kasra:" are represented by a dash placed respectively above and under the consonant they are associated with. The "Damma:" instead is like a small "waw" (Haywood & Nahmad, 1965:8) as shown in table (1.8). This shows the signs of vowels as in the following:

1. Fathah فَتْحَة is indicated by a small diagonal stroke above the consonant as in د da. It is pronounced as the u in "but".
2. Kasra كَسْرَة is a small stroke under the letter as د di. It's approximate sound is the i in "sit".
3. Damma ضَمَة is written like a miniature waw (و) above the letter, as د du. This is pronounced like the u in "put".
4. To lengthen these three short vowels, they are followed by the letters alif, ya and waw, as in مال mal, wealth, فيل fil, elephant, and حدود hudud, frontiers.
5. Sukun سُكُون The absence of a vowel is indicated by a small circle over the letter as in جزمه jazma. It should be pronounced N full stop.

Table 1.8 Vowels and transliteration (Source: Haywood & Nahmad, 1965:8)

Arabic Name	Transliteration	Nearest sound in English	Sign
فَتْحَة	fathah	"but"	ـَ
كَسْرَة	kasra:	"sit"	ـِ
ضَمَة	damma:	"put"	ـُ
سُكُون	sukun	Full stop	◌ْ

Having presented the background knowledge on some aspects of the Arabic language, the discussion continues with efforts to briefly outline the similarities and differences between idioms and two other main types of figures of speech, metaphor and simile.

1.9 Simile, Metaphors and Idioms

Similes, along with metaphors and idioms, are part of a vast family of figurative expressions that are pervasive in all languages. In simile, two dissimilar things are openly compared, as in “she is like a horse”. Nandy (1978:2) points out that a simile makes a direct comparison between two things and the comparison is explicitly created using 'like' or 'as'. The following examples in English illustrate this:

1. He was **as brave as** a lion.
2. He is **crying like** a baby.

On the other hand, metaphor represents a figurative comparison that compares one thing to another. Nandy (1978:2) shows that a metaphor is an indirect or implied comparison that usually uses some form of the word 'is' while a verb is not completely fundamental to a metaphor. The following examples in English illustrate this clearly:

1. He was a **lion** in the battle. (Meaning: Brave)
2. You are a **brick**. (Meaning: Solid, Strong)

Newmark (1988:84) states that the fundamental purpose of using a metaphor is to describe an entity, event or quality more comprehensively, in a few words and in a more complex manner. In the process, aspects of that entity are transferred to another object in order to elicit a comparison. He continues to state that in metaphor there is

observation or similarity of one or more of the features of two unlike things that have at least a partial resemblance (Newmark,1988: 84).

Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, an idiom is a group of words, whose meaning is not predictable from the individual meanings of the words used but through these words; they convey one whole item or concept in an interesting way. Below are some examples of common idioms in English:

1. You are barking up the wrong tree. (looking in the wrong place for something)
2. It is raining cats and dogs. (it is raining heavily)
3. He is wet behind the ears (He is young and inexperienced)

Larson (1984:115) defines idioms as "one class of figurative expressions which occurs in all languages, but which is very language specific. Beekman and Callow (1974:121), discussed in Larson (1984:115) mention idioms as “expressions of at least two words which cannot be understood literally and which function as a unit semantically”. In other words, idioms are phrases which, when broken into individual parts do not make sense, but are understood as a whole. To use the words of Moon (1998:4): “one type of fixed expressions that is semantically opaque”.

On aspects of similarity, both simile and metaphor compare things. However, similes involve direct comparison whereas metaphors involve implicit comparison as in the following examples:

1. He is as brave as a lion.
2. He is a lion.

The first denotes a simile which means he is very brave, whereas, the second denotes a metaphor.

Meanwhile idioms are language specific expressions that often do contain metaphors. Let's take the famous example 'kick the bucket' idiom, which means 'to die'. The word 'bucket' may be considered as a metaphor for 'life' whereas the word 'kick' may be considered as the metaphor 'bring to an end'. Thus, the whole idiom is a metaphor. The same can be said about another famous example: 'spill the beans', which means 'to reveal a secret'. The word 'spill' denotes the action of something that has dropped. This can be likened to the action of 'revealing something', thus is a metaphor for 'reveal' and the word 'beans' may be considered as the metaphor for 'secret'.

To conclude, figurative expressions play an important part in all languages and remain a perceptible facet in everyday language. They provide a colorful, fresh, interesting and meaningful way to express meaning and play a major role in daily language use.

The next section introduces the important issues that are essential to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reveals the relevant reviews, knowledge, significant issues and ideas that have been established on language and culture as well as the cultural problems in the translation of idioms from English into Arabic. Different types of idioms will be laid out, which will form the basis of the types that will be analysed in chapter 4.

2.1 Relationship between Language and Culture

Language refers to the shared knowledge of sounds, sound combinations, meaning, and rules that allow people to send and receive precise messages. Schultz et al., (2003:32) define language as follows:

A language is a dynamic set of visual, auditory, or tactile symbols of communication and the elements used to manipulate them. They show that anthropologists who refer to the study of language in cultural context, define language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols that people use to transfer their thoughts about things or people and to communicate with one another.

On the other hand, culture includes knowledge and beliefs of the group of people who share common conventions to help articulate their understandings of life and of themselves. We all have such subconscious knowledge in our minds, just as we have the subconscious knowledge of our language.

Bailey and Peoples (1999:36) argue that often each society which share a particular set of customs and cultural tradition speak the same language. Such view seems to entail, at the very least, that the language the people speak and the cultural traditions they participate are related to one another. Thus, the following sections review the

potential relationship between peoples' languages and cultures in three possible conceptions as outlined by Bailey and Peoples (1999).

2.1.1 Language as part of culture

People's language refer to one of the subsystems of their culture including a coherent set of beliefs and customs belonging to a diverse society and the language is part of culture that permits uncomplicated accurate communication between people who live their lives according to those beliefs and practices in the context of the culture to which the language is a component of. Figure (2.1) shows the circle of language inside that of culture. It is understood that language is part of culture that cannot be separated nor deleted from one another.

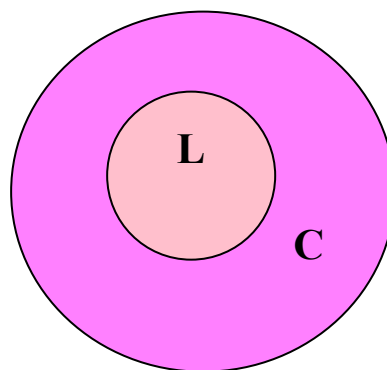


Figure (2.1) Language as part of culture.
Source: Bailey & Peoples (1999:36)

2.1.2 Language and culture as largely independent

In this conception, both culture and language are stand-alone elements whereby some elements of culture have changed deleteriously. In other words, if cultural beliefs and practices of a particular society almost die out, the group's language can and often stay somewhat integral. Figure (2.2) illustrates that the circle of culture and language cannot be completely independent and the interference between them cannot be ignored.

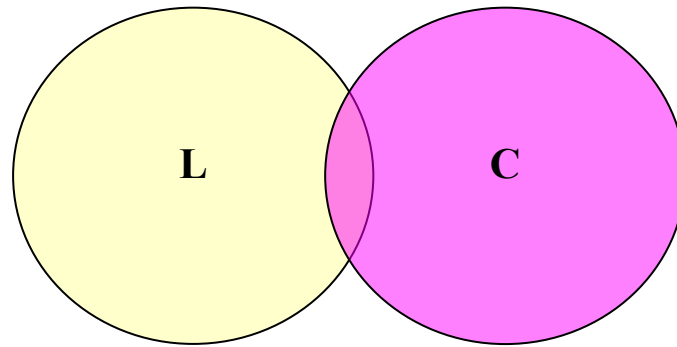


Figure (2.2) Language and culture as largely independent.
Source: Bailey & Peoples (1999:37)

2.1.3 Language and culture as partly interconnected

The third conception refers to the fact that the interconnection between language and parts of culture has diverse degrees. Bailey and Peoples (1999:37) has this to say:

First, it is clear that language is closely related to cultural classifications of reality. Second, many parts of language reflect the social relationships between people and the cultural importance people attach to different things or categories. And third, many scholars believe that language helps to shape the entire world view of a people.

Figure (2.3) below emphasizes the interconnections and the varying degrees between language and parts of culture.

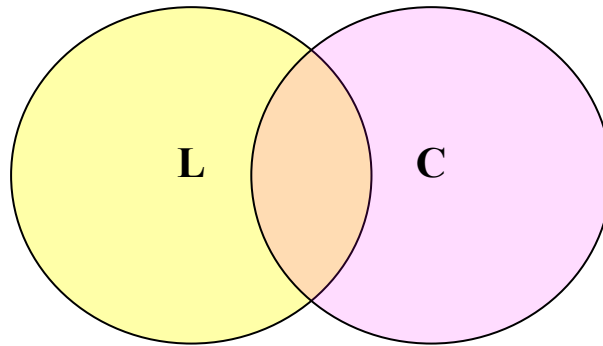


Figure (2.3) Language and Culture as partly interconnected.
Source: Bailey & Peoples (1999:38)

The scientific analysis of culture and language is conducted by Malinowski (1973:40), who found that a cultural standard of living means that new needs appear and new imperatives or determinants are imposed on human behavior. Furthermore, a philosophical understanding of another culture could not be achieved unless the ethnographer gets him/herself acquainted with the language used by members of that culture in order to generate communication with regards to their understandings of the world and of themselves.

Clearly, cultural tradition has to be transmitted from each generation to the next. Methods and mechanisms of language character must exist in every culture. Culture can show the way of life of meticulous generations. In this sense, the scholarly disciplines that pursue the anthropological and sociological facets of each culture are identified. In addition, these facets are symbolized by terminologies of languages relating to aspects of life in different cultural and social settings.

Schultz et al., (2003:38) show that both grammar and human perception are intimately interrelated with all cultural practices. In fact, any language is always a part of some culture but thinking can not easily be distinguished from the linguistic and cultural activity. Besides, they add that the essential rules of grammar stay put for valuable linguistic communication, when people compensate great efforts to preserve their awareness using whatever tools are available. Rules of grammar and rules of use can be bent or broken to achieve other communicative effects, as they are interferences of getting that communication.

Thus, it is almost impossible to tear language and culture apart. All aspects are exemplified by reciprocity and overlaps with the other aspects of life. Tengku and Moindjie (2006:82) for example show that the Malaysian language uses different forms of address to indicate class and respect and for this reason, pronouns such as, *awak*, for peers and *engkau / aku* for youngsters, *pak/mak*, for parents, *saudara/saudari* for public, and *tuanku* for king, are used. An English person/translator may find these forms of address bewildering and translating them into English might become a problem especially if one is not familiar with the source culture as these forms of address are non-existent in the target culture. Like French, Arabic, and Malay, certain pronouns are used in order to show or indicate respect.

Let alone to figure out the direction of the causal arrows that supposedly like anthropologists' views to one another, where most anthropological linguists conclude that there has not been solid evidence that grammatical features of particular languages figure out supposed patterns or cultural practices.

The seminal study in this area of linguistic competence has been done by Chomsky (1972:44). He focuses on the linguistic codes to define linguistic competence in terms of a speaker's knowledge of the difference between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in a language. However, Chomsky argues that English, like any other language, is rule-governed, otherwise, English speakers will not be able to make sense of the utterances they read or hear. Grammar books are usually designed to account for the regularities and irregularities of language. In that, Schultz et al., (2003:41) conclude:

For all their achievements, however, ethno scientists continued to work with a theoretical model of language and culture in which researchers and informants were understood to belong to mutually exclusive monolingual and mono cultural words, it was not that anthropologists failed to recognize the inaccuracy of the model. Fieldwork and study had made many of them bi- or multilingual and bi- or multicultural, and a history of colonial conquest followed by linguistic and cultural imperialism had often made many of their informants bi-or multicultural and bi – multilingual.

2.2 Culture and translation awareness

As mentioned earlier, culture can show the way of life of meticulous generations. In this sense, the scholarly disciplines that pursue the anthropological and sociological facets of each culture are identified. In addition, these facets are symbolized by terminologies of languages relating to aspects of life in different cultural and social settings.

Newmark (1991:73) states that language is a mirror that partially reflects the culture that characterizes activities and ideas and their descriptions in things and procedures for a group of people, as well as their particular settings. Language is also worldwide

and individual. Translation can defiantly be processed because of the universal and the culturally overlapping components of language. Culture is a phase of the social aspects in language. The only problem is the degree to which the cultural expression is to be clarified in translation.

Newmark (1991:168) writes about the role of culture in translation of idioms as a cultural criticism that requires exercise by the translator's country censorship.

I preface my discussion of cultural translation by pointing out that in any cultural problem, the translator has three basic choices: to keep the source language (SL) culture; to convert to target language (TL) culture; or to select a neutral international, inter-cultural term-within each of the three choices. There are various alternatives, and two or three procedures may well be combined in one translation.

He also illustrates that SL culture and TL culture are main factors which may or potentially affect the translation of a text in the translation process. Figure (2.4) shows that SL culture and TL culture are among the various factors that interrupt the translation process of a text, semantically.

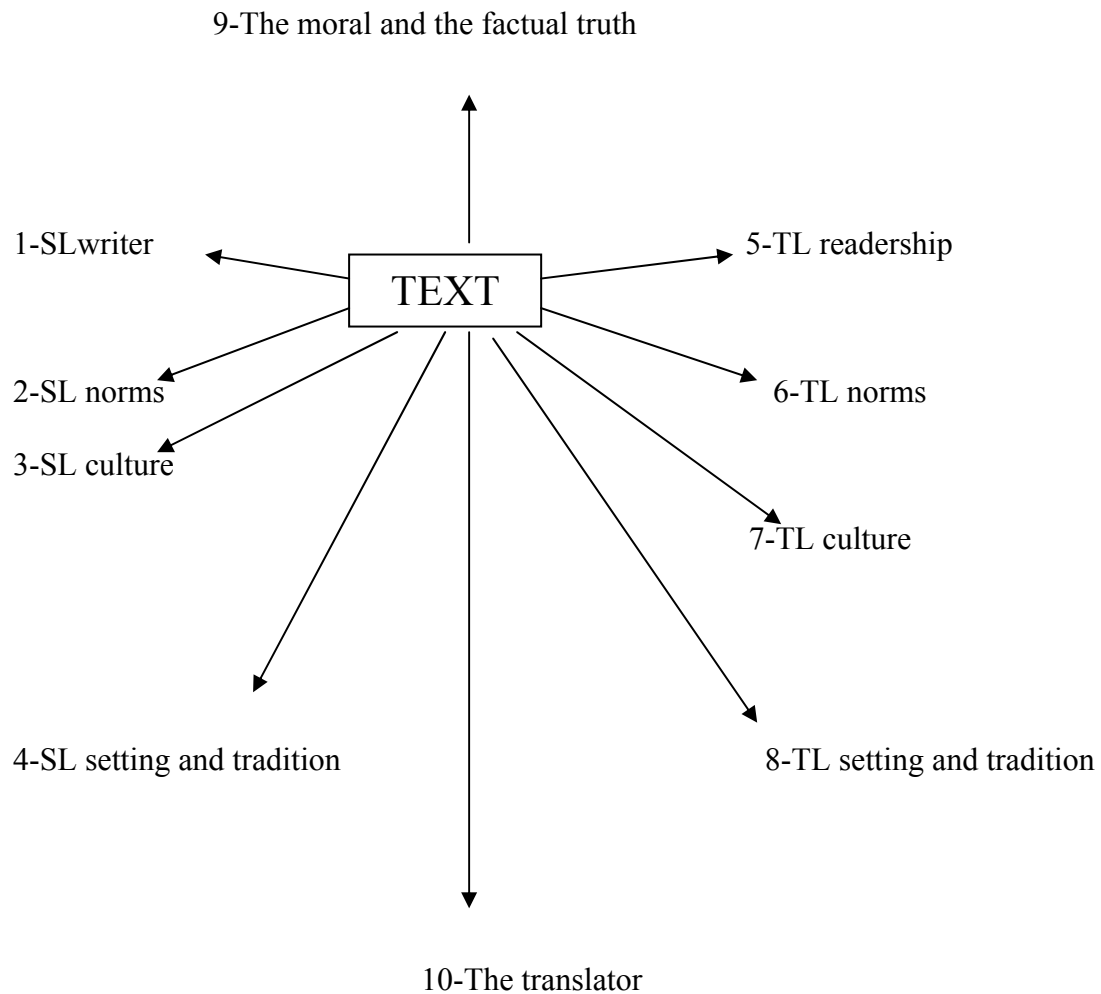


Figure (2.4) The dynamics of translation
Newmark (1991:168)

A similar study is conducted by Faiq (2004:1) who shows that cultural translation studies deal with the conditions of knowledge productions in one culture, and the way this knowledge is interpreted and relocated according to the knowledge production in another culture. According to Faiq (2004:1):

Culture refers to beliefs and value systems tacitly assumed to be collectively shared by particular social groups and to the positions taken by producers and receivers of texts, including translations, during the mediation process.

In addition, Tengku and Moindjie (2006:78) believe that the translator should be aware when dealing with some forms of culture that has a local or global role in a given society.

It can be culture as perceived by sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers or it can be culture as an expression of certain traits and characteristics of certain groups of people. Likewise, in language, the culture of science causes scientific writing to be straight forward and direct as opposed to the culture of advertising which causes commercials to be punchy and catchy but never direct.

2.3 Cultural problems in translating idioms

There have been a number of studies that have investigated cultural problems in the field of translation idioms made by linguists such as Seidl & McMordie (2003), Schultz, R, et al., (2003), Tabossi & Cacciari (1993), Makkai (1972) and Newmark (1991). Furthermore, some of these studies show the reader how the attribute of idioms is clarified into two ideas: first, meaning, which belongs to semantics; second, grammatical structure, which belongs to syntax. Idioms are not a separate part of the language. They form an essential part of the vocabulary, and are a part of the huge family of figurative language.

Seidl & McMordie (2003:13) argue that some difficulties may occur during the process of translating or using correct idioms. The first thing that makes idioms difficult to understand is their meaning because understanding an idiomatic expression is often not arrived at from the literal meaning the individual words that make them up.